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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 3, 2003**

**HECB executive director to leave state government for private sector**

**OLYMPIA-** Marc Gaspard, executive director of the Higher Education Coordinating Board, is leaving the position he has held since 1995 to join the private sector. In September, Gaspard will become president of the Washington Financial League, a trade association that works with Washington-based savings banks, savings and loan associations, and a few commercial banks.

Gaspard, who has led the HECB longer than anyone in the board's 17-year history, joined the agency following a long career with the state Legislature. In 1972, at the age of 24, Gaspard was one of the youngest members ever elected to the state House of Representatives.

In 1976, he was elected to the state Senate, where he chaired the Senate Ways & Means Committee, the combined Education/Higher Education Committee, and the Agriculture Committee. Prior to joining the HECB in December 1995, Gaspard served as Senate Majority Leader.

Gaspard said that one of the most gratifying aspects of working at the HECB has been helping students achieve their educational goals and become fully participating members of society.

"It is difficult to overstate the importance of education in people's lives, and we're reminded of that every day," Gaspard said. "From students who grew up believing they couldn't make it in college, but somehow found the tools and support they needed to realize their dreams, to others who always knew college was in their future, but still needed a little help getting there, it has been an honor to work on behalf of students and their families."

Under Gaspard's leadership, the HECB was responsible for startup and has administered the day-to-day operation of the GET pre-paid tuition program. Since the program began in 1998, more than 36,000 Washington families have opened GET accounts, with a total value of about \$365 million.

In 1999, Gaspard helped develop and implement the governor's Promise Scholarship program, which helps high-achieving students from low-income families pay for college. The program was put into place in the summer and began serving students almost immediately.

Also in 1999, the board conducted a groundbreaking process to manage high-demand enrollments at the two- and four-year colleges and universities by allocating enrollment and associated state funding through a competitive proposal process. The success of this program was one of the major reasons why the governor and Legislature appropriated \$8.3 million to the HECB for another high-demand enrollment pool for four-year universities in the 2003-05 state operating budget.

During his tenure, Gaspard and the HECB members have continually pressed the Legislature and governor to increase funding - particularly for student financial aid - and enrollments in higher education so that more students could attend college, both at the beginning of their careers and in order to upgrade their skills as the state's economy changed.

HECB Chairman Bob Craves said Gaspard has played a key role in helping the board focus on the challenges and opportunities facing higher education in the years ahead.

"Marc has been pivotal in guiding the agency toward the goal we all share here in Washington: ensuring that higher education is accessible and affordable - not just today, but for many years to come," Craves said. "His leadership will be truly missed."

Gaspard said demand on the state's colleges and universities is one of the most pressing problems facing the state over the next few years.

"Higher education faces many challenges in Washington over the next several years, the most important of which is the need to serve more than 33,000 additional full-time students, just to keep pace with population growth," Gaspard said. "The people of Washington have a longstanding commitment to a high-quality system of public higher education. It is vital to the future of our state that they maintain and strengthen that commitment."

Still, Gaspard said he is leaving the HECB with a great deal of optimism for the future of higher education in the state.

"I am exceptionally fortunate to have worked with a staff that includes some of the most talented and thoughtful people I have encountered during my career in public service, and a board of 10 citizen members who are passionate about the importance of higher education. Along with a first-rate corps of leaders in our colleges and universities, our state is very well served by the higher education community," he said.

A Washington native, Gaspard is a former Director of Community Development for Pierce College. He continues to be active in a number of civic organizations, including the Washington Initiative for Assisted Living, Vadis: a non-profit organization for the Developmentally Disabled, and Good Samaritan Hospital. He is a former member of the Tacoma-Pierce County YMCA Board of Directors and the Puyallup High School Site-Based Council.

Gaspard also serves on the executive committee of two nationally recognized higher education associations: the Western Interstate Council for Higher Education, and State Higher Education Executive Officers. He is a member of the Higher Education Facilities Authority and chairs the state's GET committee.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board is a 10-member citizen board that administers the state's student financial aid programs and provides planning, coordination, monitoring and policy analysis for higher education in Washington. The agency's executive director serves at the pleasure of the board.

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